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RUEHDK/AMEMBASSY DAKAR 1115
RUEHKM/AMEMBASSY KAMPALA 1544
RUEHNR/AMEMBASSY NAIROBI 3941
RUEHFR/AMEMBASSY PARIS 1312
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RHEFDIA/DIA WASHDC//DHO-7//
RHEHAAA/NSC WASHDC
RUEHBS/USEU BRUSSELS
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RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK 1706
RUEATRS/DEPT OF TREASURY WASHDC
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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 HARARE 000156

SIPDIS

SENSITIVE
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AF/S FOR S. HILL
NSC FOR SENIOR AFRICA DIRECTOR B. PITTMAN
USAID FOR M. COPSON AND E. LOKEN
ADDIS ABABA FOR USAU
ADDIS ABABA FOR ACSS

E.O. 12958: N/A
TAGS: [PHUM](#) [ELAB](#) [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [ZI](#)
SUBJECT: TEACHERS SCORE "VICTORY", CALL OFF STRIKES

REF: HARARE 00082

Summary

[1](#)1. (U) On February 23 both the Zimbabwe Teachers' Association (ZIMTA) and the Progressive Teachers' Union of Zimbabwe (PTUZ) called off strikes that had crippled numerous schools throughout the country. Teachers returned to work after the Civil Service Association Apex Council, which represents all civil servants including teachers, accepted the government's offer of Z\$528,000 (about US\$72.00) as a minimum wage for teachers. The increased salaries, which are still below the poverty datum line (PDL), are not pegged to the country's soaring inflation.

[1](#)2. (U) ZIMTA and PTUZ leaders were disappointed with the final agreement but feared the government was ready to follow through on threats to fire striking teachers. In a broader context, the end of the strikes only temporarily alleviates the government's fear that the labor unrest could spread to other civil servant sectors and cause serious problems for the struggling regime. Moreover, by giving in to the teachers' demands, the GOZ has set a precedent for further wage increases to the rest of the civil service which will only fuel more (hyper) inflation. End Summary.

Teachers Try To Leverage Spreading Labor Unrest

[1](#)3. (U) Teachers began the year hoping to take advantage of

momentum started with a spate of recent strikes across the public sector, including actions by workers at the public electric company, by junior doctors and nurses at public hospitals, and by lecturers and students at public universities. Separately, ZIMTA and PTUZ leadership were seeking to force the government to significantly increase teachers' salaries and benefits.

¶4. (U) The PTUZ labor action began on January 31 when the group's activist secretary general, Raymond Majongwe, called for a "go-slow" by its 17,000 members (reftel). The PTUZ action showed signs of success as teachers at a number of schools throughout the country came to work, but refused to teach. At the time, ZIMTA, commonly seen as the more "government-friendly" of the two unions, opted to continue negotiating rather than join the strike.

¶5. (U) After weeks of futile negotiations, however, the ZIMTA leadership called for its 55,000 members to go out on strike on February 20. Peter Mabande, chief executive officer for ZIMTA, told poloff on February 21 that ZIMTA hoped to exert leverage on the GOZ through the government,s fear that the ZIMTA strike could spark wider labor unrest in other civil service sectors. (Note: ZIMTA President Tendai Chikowore also currently serves as the Chairperson of the Civil Servant Association Apex Council, which represents all 180,000 civil servants, including teachers. End Note.)

¶6. (U) As the Apex Council leadership negotiated with the Public Services Commission, the PTUZ and ZIMTA strikes succeeded in shutting down numerous schools throughout the country, especially in the high-density suburbs of the

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capital city Harare and the second city Bulawayo. Additionally, there were growing rumors that other civil servants were ready to join the strike.

Final Agreement Falls Short Of Teachers' Demands

¶7. (U) The teachers' key demand was for the government to "link" salaries to the poverty datum line (PDL), the minimum monthly amount required to meet basic needs for an average family of five currently set by the government at Z\$566,400 (about US\$77.00). This would allow teachers' salaries to be increased automatically on a periodic basis to keep pace with inflation. (Note: For over a year government and business have successfully ignored demands from the broader labor movement to link wages to the PDL. End Note.) In the end, the teachers accepted a total sub-PDL minimum pay package of Z\$528,000 per month (about US\$72.00), which was not indexed to the country's soaring inflation.

A Strategic Retreat

¶8. (U) Mabande told us the government negotiators claimed that its final offer included the full amount of salary increments for teachers the government had set aside for the entire year; there was nothing more and, absent a deal, the government,s next step was to arrest ZIMTA and PTUZ leadership for calling illegal strikes and to fire striking teachers. Mabande thought that accepting the offer was in teachers, best interest.

¶9. (U) Majongwe, on the other hand, believed that the strike and risk it could spread across all civil service sectors posed a significant threat to the government. He maintained to us that the Apex Council had "sold-out" by accepting a bad deal. Nevertheless, PTUZ, as the smaller union, and without the support of ZIMTA, was forced into a &strategic retreat.8

Comment

¶10. (SBU) There were no winners in this settlement. With the threat of being arrested, beaten and fired, teachers opted to save their job, and accepted limited wage increases. However, the government bought only a temporary peace and in several months time, when inflation has eroded the pay increase, is likely to face renewed labor unrest on the part of the teachers. In the interval, the government has also set itself up for demands from other public sector workers for similar pay increase, which it also can't afford. Eventually the government will face the wide-spread public employee strikes it narrowly averted this time around. End Comment.
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